

REVELATION, PART 1

ACTS 10.1-8

Here in these two chapters of Acts, we read one of the greatest stories ever recorded in the Bible. Here is our claim to the privilege of knowing Christ as Savior. Here is the story...

- of our independence day
- of our being extended the privilege of knowing the gospel of Jesus Christ
- of His grace which frees us from the penalty of sin and offers us the kind of life that only God knows – eternal life.

Familiarity often breeds contempt, and this story is one that is so easy to pass by and take for granted when it is only by the divine will of God working in the lives of unsuspecting yet obedient disciples that we have this knowledge of salvation.

The story is certainly a watershed event in the life of the church and in the spreading of the Gospel. After this, the doorway to salvation is wide open to all peoples of all nations to the ends of the earth.

It is such an important story that Luke tells it twice in **chapters 10 and 11**. In fact, the story of Cornelius' vision is told three times.

Beginning in **Acts 8**, we find Peter involved in his first missionary journey. He left the city of Jerusalem and traveled to Samaria, returned to Jerusalem, then continued to preach among many of the villages in the region of Samaria.

After an interlude in the story where Luke tells us of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch and of Saul of Tarsus, we rejoined Peter's journey to Lydda, then to Joppa, and today, to Caesarea, after which he will return to Jerusalem.

God had intended for the Jews to be separate from other nations in the sense of sanctification and holiness, but not in the sense of isolation.

The Jews had for generations misunderstood, misinterpreted and misapplied God's teachings concerning what was clean and what

was unclean. They had taken God's call for distinction and turned it into a complicated set of rules for distancing themselves from all men who were not Jews.

Peter believed these laws like all other Jews did. But now, God was moving him farther away from his source of comfort and support and was taking him to place he may never have gone if he had been invited at an earlier time.

First of all, he went to the Samaritans. This was uncomfortable for Peter, because to do so meant that he had to risk becoming ceremonially unclean. But the call of God was strong, and Peter was obedient.

Next, he went to Lydda and then to Joppa where he had to come into contact with a woman who had died. All Jews knew that contact with a dead body would make you unclean.

Finally, we learn that Peter found housing with one Simon, a tanner. This man's occupation required him to be in contact with dead animals on a daily basis. And for Peter to be in contact with someone unclean made him unclean also.

In every case, Peter has been faithful to the call of Christ on his life and has carried through on the mission. As is evident from all that has transpired so far, the walls of separation are slowly but surely coming down.

The story in Acts 10 begins with a Roman commander named Cornelius who received from God a commendation and a commandment who then gave a commission to his servants and a soldier to go find Peter.

Verses 1-3a - Commander

- Centurion @ Capernaum, **Luke 7.1-10**
Jesus said of him, "I have not found such a great faith in all of Israel."
- Centurion @ Calvary, **Matt. 27.54**
Said of Jesus, "Truly this man was the Son of God."
- Centurion @ Caesarea, **Acts 10-11**

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Cornelius was the commander of a **century** – 80-100 Roman soldiers – thus he was called a centurion. In today's army, he might be closest to the rank of captain.

His force belonged to the Italian **band**.

Band (cohort, tribune) = 6 centuries or 500-600 soldiers

1/10 of a Roman **legion** = 5000-6000 soldiers

Italian – recruited from the homeland of Italy. No question of their loyalty.

This centurion, similar to the one Jesus encountered in Capernaum, loved the Jews and worshiped their God.

- Devout – religious, pious, of good reputation, of high standing among the people. He loved the Jews, the people of God and had a good report among them.
- Feared God – not only him, but his entire household, including his family and his servants and apparently soldiers who were assigned to be with him regularly
- Gave much alms – His works. He cared for the poor and spent much of his own money feeding and clothing those who were less fortunate than he.
- Prayed to God always – His worship.

He had apparently abandoned the worship of the pantheon of Roman and Greek gods to worship the one true God of Israel.

Cornelius was a good man who practiced his religion individually as well as in his household and before his community, yet even all of this was not enough for God to declare him righteous, because righteousness never comes by works....

...but only by the grace of God.

On this particular day, Cornelius has spent most of the day fasting (**Acts 10.30**), and about 300 in the afternoon, while he is praying, Cornelius had a vision in which he said a man stood before him dressed in bright clothing.

Immediately, this “being” spoke to Cornelius, calling him by name.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Cornelius responded, “What is it, Lord?”

Some might argue that, since Cornelius referred to the man as Lord, then it could have been that Christ himself appeared to him. But the term lord (*kurois*) is often used as a title of respect, like we might say, “Sir.”

Also, the best commentary on the Bible is the Bible, and both Luke and Peter identify this being as an angel.

When he saw the angel, Cornelius responded the way almost every other person in Scripture responded when they saw an angel – He was afraid.

- Daniel – Dan. 10 – “stood trembling”
- Zacharias – Luke 1 – “fear fell upon him”
- Mary – Luke 1 – “fear not”
- Shepherds – Luke 2 – “they were sore afraid”

However our imaginations have allowed us to visualize what an angel looks like, they must present a frightening appearance.

Cornelius responded, “What is it, Lord?” in fear.

The angel then gave Cornelius...

- **Commendation**
- **Commandment**

Verses 3b-4 – Commendation

Your prayers and your alms have come before the Lord as a remembrance.

Some might argue that Cornelius was one who sought righteousness through his good works (his alms – acts on behalf of men, especially those who are very poor) and his worship toward God.

But the more likely scenario is that Cornelius did good works as a result of his faith.

Heb. 11.1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a

good report. 4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

Some might also argue that God chose Cornelius for salvation because of his good works and worship.

Once again, we go back to **Hebrews 11**.

Abraham did not earn the calling of God by the merit of his good works. Abraham was faithful to God after having been called by God to leave his home and to follow God's commands.

Hebrews 11.6 Without faith it is impossible to please God...

The angel indicated that God was pleased with Cornelius, not because of his good works and faithful worship, but because of the faith that inspired them.

Not only did the angel give Cornelius a commendation. He also gave him a commandment.

Verses 5-6 – Commandment

It is interesting to note how specific this story is.

This was not just any centurion, but a **certain** centurion. God did not just call any man to this task, but one certain man. Why? Because God is sovereign and He does what He purposes.

The angel even called Cornelius by name.

Now we hear the angel tell Cornelius, not only who to call (Peter), but what city he is in (Joppa), and the owner of the house in which he resides (Simon, the tanner).

God is very specific and His plans are perfect.

It is interesting to compare the events of this story with the similar intervention of God in the salvation story of the Ethiopian eunuch.

In the story of Philip, the angel was sent to the preacher to bring him together with the prospect, the eunuch.

In this story, the angel was sent to the prospect who was instructed to send for a preacher.

In both cases, the angel's task was to bring the men preacher and the prospect together.

God calls men to salvation. It is within His domain and His sovereignty to do so. Without divine intervention, these meetings would never have taken place.

Yet we find in Scripture that He almost always works through other men, the case of Saul being one of the most notable exceptions.

Romans 10.13 ...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. 14 But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (ESV)

Philip would never have known anything about the eunuch on the road to Ethiopia if God had not called him to go the road south of Jerusalem.

Cornelius would never have known that the blood of Christ had been made available to him or that Peter was just down the road in Joppa if the angel had not told him so.

And neither would any other person have known to tell them.

Salvation comes to men through the testimony of other men, but it is God who directs our steps and brings the messenger and the inquirer together.

Verses 7-8 – Commission

Cornelius was immediately obedient to the commands he had been given, as any soldier would be when given orders by his commanding officer.

He sent these men – men whom it seems he had personally taught concerning the things of God – to Joppa to find Peter because he had a desire to be saved and he knew, from what the angel had told him, that Peter had the words of life that could bring it to be.

When Peter retold this story later to the disciples in Jerusalem, he told them that the angel said to Cornelius...

Acts 11:14 *he (Peter) will declare to you a message (will share words with you) by which you will be saved, you and all your household.*

Cornelius was only one individual man, as was Peter. Yet God brought them together without their full understanding in order that Cornelius would be saved. You see, God is sovereign in salvation as He is in all other realms of this universe. It is He who determines the when, the where, and the how of salvation.

Both Peter and Cornelius were simply obedient to the commands of God and, as they acted, they set in motion one of the greatest revelations that the early church had yet received...

...One that would turn the world upside down for God's glory.

It is certain that you are not here this morning by accident. God has brought you here by divine appointment either because He wanted you to hear the words of life for your own salvation or He wanted to better prepare you to serve Him by carrying that word to someone else.

This morning, you are Peter. Somewhere in the coming days, God has set a divine appointment with Cornelius.

Will you be obedient to His calling?